

BURDEN BEARING.

A SERMON

BY

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"The following sermon is the product of Rev. James A. G. Stirling, of Glenella, Man., a thoughtful Scottish minister who has been laboring in the mission field in Manitoba and the North West Territories for five years, and whose energy and ability have attracted the notice of the leaders of Presbyterian thought in this province. Rev. Mr. Stirling comes of good ministerial stock, his father being a Presbyterian minister at York, England. The author of the sermon is one of the best Scottish scholars in the province, being versed in the literature and lore of his native land. It is not unlikely that he will be heard on the lecture platform from time to time in Manitoba."—Reprinted from the Saturday's issue of *The Daily Tribune* (Dec. 6) and the Wednesday's issue of *The Weekly Tribune* (Dec. 17, 1902).

BURDEN BEARING.

Text: "For each man shall bear *his own* burden," (Gal. vi. 5).
"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee," etc., (Ps. lv. 22). "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," (Gal. vi. 2).

The theme of this discourse is—Burden Bearing; and this theme has been suggested to me by the three portions of Scripture which I have chosen as my text. I have brought these three texts together, not because of their resemblance to each other in phraseology, but because they represent the successive steps in a spiritual process.

The first step is this—"Each man shall bear *his own* burden." The burdens which men have to carry throughout life vary alike in kind and in quantity, yet "each man shall bear his own burden." I must, for example, bear the burden of responsibility. Just because I am a man, endowed by God with intellect, conscience and will, and informed by nature or revelation, or both, as to what my duty is, I bear the burden of responsibility both to God and to my fellow-men. Responsibility is a burden which every man must bear. The words of St. Paul are universally true—"So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God," (Rom. xiv. 12). There are, of course, degrees of responsibility, as our Lord teaches us in these words. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more." (St. Luke, xii. 47-48). Every man must bear the burden of responsibility, and the responsibility of each man is just in proportion to his knowledge and opportunities. God will require much from us who have been born into Christian homes and who have heard from our infancy the Gospel's joyful sound. Let us remember that each man must bear the burden of his own responsibility, and this burden of personal responsibility for the right ordering of his own life and conduct both in the sight of God and man, he cannot transfer to the shoulders of another. "Each man shall bear *his own* burden."

Another burden which each man must bear is sorrow. The forms of sorrow may vary, but there is no escape from its universal sway. In a world in which death is the law of all organic life and limitation the attribute of every human thing, pain and sorrow must exist, but what adds to sorrow its bitterest sting is the fact that it is connected with and often the result of sin, and sin is just disobedience to the categorical imperatives of our higher nature and to the explicit commands of God. Even our Lord, sinless though He was, was yet a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:" for He came into a world blackened with sin and into fatal contact with evil in its most aggravated and concentrated forms. Sorrow is a universal experience; and every man must bear the burden of his own sorrow. There is a crook in every lot, a skeleton in every cupboard, a sorrow in every life. Each man must bear the burden of his own sorrow, and often he must bear it in silence and alone, unsolaced by the sympathy of a kindred soul.

If sorrow is a burden common to all men, so is guilt the universal heritage of the race. Guilt is that state of liability to deserved censure and punishment which is the result of disobedience to the voice of our higher nature and the injunctions of the Moral Law, whether as expressed through human legislation or through the revealed commands of God. The guilty man may be unconscious of the full enormity of the crime which he has committed, or he may commit the evil deed deliberately, and with the full consciousness of its enormity and unlawfulness. There are, doubtless, varying degrees of guilt, but the one important thing to remember is this—that it is a personal state and quality of the soul in opposition to and in conflict with the laws of God and man. No man can transfer his own guilt to another. Each man must bear the burden of his own guilt. No other can bear it for him. With what clearness of moral insight does the great prophet, Ezekiel, declare: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (Ezekiel xviii. 20). "Each man shall bear his own burden"—the burden of responsibility, the burden of sorrow, the burden of guilt.

The second portion of Scripture which we now purpose briefly to consider qualifies and supplements the truth contained in the text which we have just been considering. It is this: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord"—i.e., Jehovah—"and He shall sustain thee." We read this Psalm, as we read the whole of the older Scriptures in the light of the Incarnation and of the Cross. The text has been often misunderstood, and pious ignorance has often understood the text thus: "Cast

thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain it"—i.e., take it away from you. The real meaning is this: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain"—not *it*—but "*thee*." Some people imagine that when they become Christians all the burdens of life will forthwith be rolled away from their path, and that they will always be marching through a land, flowing with milk and honey, shouting hallelujah. The very reverse is often the case. The burdens often remain, and are, sometimes, even heavier than they were before. St. Paul, for example, had a thorn in the flesh, "a messenger of Satan" sent to buffet him, lest he should be "exalted overmuch." Was it taken away, because he was no longer a Jewish persecutor but a Christian? No. The thorn in the flesh remained, even in spite of the fact that he besought the Lord thrice for its removal. The burden was his own, and he bore it; yet, not in his own strength: for the answer to his prayer was this: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. xii. 9). Surely, this promise of the Master is just the reiteration of the older promise: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

When a man becomes a Christian he does not lose the burden of his responsibility, but, on the contrary, his sense of responsibility is quickened and intensified. A father is responsible for the nurture and education of his children; and, if he fails to perform his parental duties from the promptings of nature, human legislation may take steps to quicken his sense of duty. But, if such a father is a Christian, the sense of his responsibility is deepened and intensified. He will not only support and educate his children in the worldly sense, but he will set before them the example of a Christ-like life and will seek to "nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." A servant is responsible to his master for the efficient and faithful discharge of his duties; and, if he is utterly negligent, may be dismissed by his master, or even punished by human law; but, if he is a Christian, the burden of his responsibility is even increased and the whole duty of service is transformed into a service rendered unto Christ Himself. St. Paul who rises to his highest level when he lets *rabbini*sing alone and descants on the great themes of our moral and religious duties, has laid down for all ages the Christian ideal of what a servant ought to be when he says: "Servants, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men;" etc., (Eph. vi. 5-7).

A master is responsible to his servants and to society, and may even, if neglectful of his duties, be brought under the jurisdiction of

human law, but if he is a Christian master his duties will be transfigured by the presence and power of a new motive and a new ideal. He will not regard his servants merely as the instruments of his own aggrandisement, but as his brethren and the servants of a common Lord. Let us quote again the words of St. Paul: "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, and forbear threatening: knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him." (Eph. vi. 9). It is evident from these examples that while every man must bear the burden of responsibility that burden of responsibility will be enlarged and intensified in the case of the man who is a Christian, just because the constraining power of the love of Christ and of His gracious teachings has renewed and quickened the moral and spiritual activities of the soul.

Another burden which, as we have already indicated, every man must bear is the burden of sorrow. The Christian is not, because of his acceptance of the joyful news of the Gospel, liberated from the burden of sorrow. The burden of sorrow remains, but it has become transmuted into the chastening of the Lord. It is no longer a calamity, but a discipline. It is the refiner's fire which purges away the dross that the gold may be revealed in all its purity and radiance. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe thy word." (Ps. cix. 67). These are the words of the Psalmist, but they have embodied the experience of many a saint of God throughout the Jewish and Christian ages. The Christian character is the result of growth and development. An essential element in its growth and one which helps to produce richness, mellowness, sweetness and beauty is the discipline of sorrow. It is a mark of our Heavenly Father's love for us His children. Woe betide us if we bear it in any other spirit than that of meekness and resignation. Alas! that it should so often produce the wrong effects and make people sour, morose and misanthropic with all the springs of hope and love and joy frozen into an eternal winter. "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reproved of him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Heb. xii. 5-6).

Cast your own burden of sorrow upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will give you grace to bear it for your own good and His glory, and the words of St. Paul will be the expression of your own experience—"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13). The great lesson of patient and unceasing trust in God is enforced with exquisite power and beauty in the following lines by an American poet, Dr. Robert McIntyre.

" There's a flow'ret grows called the mountain rose—
 Many blossoms are far more fair—
 But the brave, wee thing doth climb and cling
 Far aloft in the frosty air,
 Where it lifts its bloom and spills perfume
 O'er the feet of the forest pine,
 Which leads the van of the forest clan,
 Where the snow-slide sets its awful ban,
 On the edge of the Timber Line.

" There's a maid doth dwell on the rim of hell,
 In the end of a sin-cursed street,
 Where the sneers are sped about her head
 And the snares set for her feet.
 Though lust may lower, no sweeter flower
 Ever grew on avenue fine;
 And her heart doth ache to heal and make
 Their souls all white for His dear sake
 On the edge of the Timber Line.

" There's a man doth stand in the borderland,
 Where he battles for daily bread
 For his children's sake, and doth calmly stake
 His all on his God o'erhead.
 Be strong, my brother, some day or other
 His saints will the stars outshine.
 We shall with him sup, he will fill the cup,
 And his own right hand shall lift us up
 From the edge of the Timber Line."

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall make thy righteousness to go forth as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." (Ps. xxxvii. 5-6). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

THE BURDEN OF GUILT.

But, as has been indicated, every man must also bear the burden of his own guilt and that guilt he cannot transfer to another. It is a personal state or mode of being—a quality of the soul. Moral and immoral states of personal existence are not transferable from one person to another, like private, or landed property. Each man must bear the burden of his own guilt. If guilt means liability to moral censure or punishment, and also, in most cases, consciousness of personal corruption and demerit, how is it to be got rid of? If I truly repent of my sin, confess it to Almighty God, and, if need be, to my

fellow-men; and, if I also forsake it, will God, on these conditions, forgive my sins? I unhesitatingly answer—Yes. This has always been God's method of forgiving sin. And Divine forgiveness of sin includes within its scope the removal of liability to punishment and the bestowal upon the penitent sinner of that new nature which overcomes the power of the old sinful nature. And this doctrine of the Divine forgiveness finds expression in the words of Christ Himself, and is assured to us in the life and death of the Son of God Incarnate who, though Himself sinless, suffered at the hands of sinful men and died the accursed death of the cross, in order that men might be reconciled to God. When a man comes under the influence of Christ's teaching and example, and meditates upon His awful death, there are two things which he realizes in the most vivid manner: namely, his own sinfulness and the ineffable love of God. Conscious of his own sinfulness and with a heart touched by the love of God as revealed in the life and death of His dear Son, he repents, confesses his sin, forsakes it, accepts of Christ as his Saviour, and is forgiven. He is reconciled to God, and is no longer subject to the Divine punishment. He is no longer under the terrible bondage of sin: for he has come under the power of the constraining love of Christ and his whole nature has been changed. He has lost the burden of guilt, and has become a new creature in Christ Jesus who can now say in the language of St. Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." (Gal. ii. 20).

Brethren, if we bear all our burdens in the strength of Christ's sustaining grace, we shall not sink under them but grow in spiritual stature. I have read of an old Scottish martyr who had on his crest the engraving of a palm tree with weights hanging from its fronds and also the motto: *Sub pondere cresco*—I grow under a weight. The man who bears all the burdens of his life with the consciousness that the Lord is sustaining him is like this beautiful Oriental tree. He grows under a weight. Poverty, disease, bereavement, suspicion, slander, persecution, faithlessness of friends,—none of these things can bow him down: for he is growing under them and because of them, upwards and God-ward. *Sub pondere cresco*—I grow under a weight is his experience and his motto. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree," etc. (Ps. xcii. 12).

"Each man shall bear his own burden;" but he may bear it in his own strength, or, he may bear it in the strength of God, conscious that God is sustaining him. Such a man is a strong man; he has solved the problem of burden bearing. But the strong man will not remain inactive. What, then, is his duty? Here it is in the words of St. Paul,

when writing to the Romans: "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Rom. xv. 1). This is just the same thought which St. Paul expresses, when writing to the Galatians, in the words of our third text: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Many people deliberately increase and accentuate their own burdens and, by their inhuman conduct, make the burdens of life harder for their fellow-men. How sadly true are the exquisite lines of the great Scottish poet!

"Many and sharp the numerous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves
Regret, remorse, and shame;
And man, whose heaven-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn:

"See yonder poor, o'erlabored wight,
So abject, mean, and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil;
And see his lordly fellow-worn
The poor petition spurn,
Unmindful, though a weeping wife
And helpless offspring mourn."

Brethren, the words of our final text form the climax of spiritual life and experience. Let us not fail to remember that the love of Christ is not only a *sustaining* but also a *constraining* love. It is, as Chalmers finely puts it: "The expulsive power of a new affection." It expels sinful passions and constrains us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. What was that law? The law of love. It is this law which Christ fulfilled perfectly and which He thus commands us His disciples to obey: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (St. John xiii. 34).

Brethren, these three texts are not contradictory but supplementary to one another. They form the successive steps of a spiritual process. "Each man shall bear his own burden." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee;" etc. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

